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CO-ORDINATION, OR METHOD IN CO-OPERATION*

In inviting your attention to the subject of co-ordination, I bring before you what may accurately be termed a present-day problem. It is not absolutely new, but it is at least recent. Each generation has tasks peculiarly its own to surmount; and co-ordination is one of ours. Moreover, in the sense in which we use it tonight, viz., systematic co-operation, it is sufficiently large to include within itself many special questions which are being actively canvassed, and are daily becoming more and more prominent.

The first chapter in the history of popular libraries (I should rather say the *earlier chapters*, having regard to the vast amount of creative work they embody) closed almost simultaneously with the nineteenth century. This coincidence is worth noting, because most of the questions which had taxed the powers of the founders of this Association had been finally settled by that date. Some were disposed of even earlier, and a few have lingered longer. But, after all, the day for discussing library technique or method is almost gone. If this matter be not closed, it has at any rate, in parliamentary phrase, "reached the committee stage," and the same thing is equally true of other questions of internal management, as well as of those which bear on the library's relation to the public.

Now, these problems were, if one may so say, formative, i. e., they were connected with libraries in the making; they were individualistic like the era to which they belong. For they arose in the early years of the library movement while the

evolution of the individual library was taking place. This involved perfecting all those processes (many of them technical, though none the less weighty on that account, since every art or profession is based on technique), which had to do with the single book as the first term in a series that culminated in the working library—the final one. That was co-ordination—of the forces *within* the library.

But the formative period is over. Organized libraries are to be found at every turn. And the problems which now confront us are different from the earlier ones. They no longer have to do with libraries as *final* terms in a series, but as *first* terms in a new series of larger proportions. The twentieth century has the task of evoking method and order *among* rather than *within* libraries. It must discover a classification not for the volumes on the shelves (which has already been done), but for the libraries themselves, grading them as it were, and welding them into a complete system. Not a "library system" such as is already exemplified in the great cities, though this, to some extent, embodies the idea in little; but a single comprehensive organization in which each member shall have its own definite part to play, yet will also stand in distinct and mutually helpful relations to all the other members, acknowledging, each one, that it owes a duty to the whole body, although preserving complete freedom as to its own individual management and interests. Such an organization, such a system of libraries, is the final term in the new series. In it the libraries of the country would stand not as independent units, but as *inter*-dependent partners. And its ultimate attainment should, I believe, be the aim *par excellence* of this generation of librarians.

Do you exclaim, "This is a hard saying: who can hear it? Proof!" I point you to the fact that combination and organization are among the strongest tendencies, the very watchwords of the age. How should librarians, then, keep aloof from them? I point you also to the trend of library opinion as evinced in recent professional literature. And I hope later on

*The writer wishes to acknowledge his indebtedness to the address delivered by President Eliot before the Magnolia Conference in 1902. Since that date he has given what thought he could spare to the subject of co-ordination, and to such literature bearing on it as he has found. Probably owing to its title, "President Eliot and discrimination in books," Mr W. E. Foster's illuminating article published in the Library Journal, vol. 27, p. 260, escaped him until the present address was all but finished. He would call particular attention to this fact because of certain coincidences in thought between Mr Foster's paper and the short article on Regional libraries published in the Library Journal June, 1908, which latter is practically an outline of a portion of the present address.

to be able at least to suggest that a system such as has been mentioned would not only be most desirable in itself, as tending to greater efficiency and to economy of effort, but that the mere fact of its existence would dispose of most of the questions that are now pressing on us for solution.

This is true, for instance, of book selection, disposal of duplicates, storage, clearing houses—which together form what might be called “the overcrowding or congestive group.” With other groups less prominent at the moment, but no less vital, it falls into place among those problems which may be broadly characterized as involving the treatment of masses of books rather than single volumes. In conjunction with these and, I think, not otherwise, it can be satisfactorily solved, as one phase of the broad subject of co-ordination.

Inasmuch as my remarks are intended, in part, to serve as a sort of prologue to the next general session, I can venture to omit or pass lightly by certain aspects of my theme, confining myself to a somewhat general consideration of it and leaving illustrations to follow. Nevertheless, it would be proper, I suppose, to grow reminiscent here over what has thus far been accomplished in the way of co-ordination. Even this review, however, I shall spare you; albeit, if I did not, your sufferings on account of it would be short. For, though a good deal has lately been written on the subject, it would not take many minutes to tell what has actually been done.

Co-operation, of course, there has long been in a multitude of directions, and in—even between—many different countries. Of that I am not now speaking; and I therefore pass by the bibliographies, the indexing and cataloging, in which, as might have been expected, co-operation has made its most pronounced advance. Co-operative indexing and cataloging, indeed, must rank among the great achievements of their own or of any time.

And co-operation has still more to its credit. For example, that you and I should be supplied with descriptive lists of certain books together with the information that

the books may be consulted in, possibly borrowed from, certain libraries, is really a triumph of co-operation; our acceptance of it almost as a matter of course merely going to show our familiarity with conveniences which a few years ago were unheard of. But to put these books in my hand, and in considerable numbers; not merely a volume now and then, demands, not greater skill or learning than the former service, but a larger measure of correlated effort spread over a wider field—and of such, the instances now on record serve chiefly to pave the way for future experiments.

I say this, knowing full well that the very principle which underlies state libraries, and perhaps state commissions, too, is co-ordinative; nor do I forget the co-operation that has long existed between the Chicago libraries, the still more comprehensive plan inaugurated in Providence and described in 1897 by Mr Foster, Mr Rowell's account in 1898 of what had been done in California, European experiments in Belgium, Germany and England, nor finally the nascent county library movements which are already full of promise for this country. Still, I repeat, these efforts, valuable for what they have accomplished, are, above all, valuable as showing what may be done. Because, as one studies them, one finds that without exception they converge upon the comprehensive organization referred to a moment ago.

As you observe, I have, thus far, been speaking of co-ordination in the most general terms. Let us now look at it in one particular aspect, as it relates to the supply and distribution of books. This is, perhaps the ultimate and crowning purpose of co-ordination. Indeed it constitutes so large a part of all library effort that we can well afford for the time to overlook other sides of the subject. Then, too, the obstacles to putting it into execution are serious enough to merit separate consideration. The question of supply will naturally include provision for reaching all the libraries of the country; while distribution, if it be effective, will, among other things, bring relief to congested libraries.

Apart from purchase and gift, one library can obtain a supply of books only by borrowing from another. But, though inter-library loans have been going on for years, and have now grown very usual, they are still effected chiefly between the greater libraries; while the books lent are restricted, in the main, to those needed for serious study or research. Indeed, I think I am right in saying that the regulations of most libraries favor no other class of inter-library loans strictly so called. Lighter works are on an avowedly different footing and are circulated mainly through traveling libraries or similar agencies, when the great libraries circulate them at all. But I need not labor to prove what you will grant, that as things stand today, no library is in a position to lend to other libraries considerable numbers of books either popular or semi-popular in character. Not one is equipped for such work.

Yet the public library is a democratic institution; and democracies are not, I believe, usually supposed to consist wholly of persons addicted to serious study. So that apparently, in any system which may be devised, there must be provision for widening the scope of inter-library loans, until they include other than scholarly works. We all of us have a great respect for the scholar, but his are not the only interests to consider.

Moreover, simply to enlarge the circle of readers, will not suffice. What of the small libraries, which form the great majority of libraries of the land, and are doing collectively a vast and steadily broadening work? I pass by the immense amount of duplication of books and of effort to which, under existing conditions, these libraries are condemned. Much of this is indispensable, and, of course, always will be, though far too much is wasteful, and ought to be made unnecessary. That which concerns us at present, however, is the isolation of the smaller libraries, notwithstanding their proximity to each other and, sometimes, to leading institutions. Despite their slender stock of books they must rely mainly on themselves. They borrow rarely, and their fa-

cilities for doing so, always inferior, often seem to be practically *nil*. It may be urged that a rural library does not need very many books. True, other things being equal, a small community will need fewer books than a large community. On the other hand, the fewer books a library controls, the greater the probability of its needing others which it does not possess. Clearly, then, any "system of libraries" must reach out to, and include, the small libraries of the country; nothing could justly be called a system that failed to take account of these.

But how are they to be included? They will not be greatly advantaged by borrowing from each other. They must apply to libraries larger than themselves. The great libraries, as has been said, are not equipped to furnish the requisite literature; besides, they have their own readers whose claims must, of course, be first considered. Here, however, the medium-sized library will probably be found a powerful coadjutor. Among this large class there must be thousands of books not in frequent use, which, with suitable arrangements, could be made available for inter-library loans.

Yet here again we find isolation. Although we have discovered a potential source of supply, means of access are in great measure wanting. The medium-sized library is not, as yet, much more fully prepared for lending than are the lesser ones. On the other hand, it is in almost equal need of enlarged borrowing powers.

So much then for supply. The outlook is not too pleasing, is it? Let us turn for a moment to distribution.

Seven years ago, at Magnolia, this Association had the honor of listening to a notable paper by the head of a great university. The thesis, if I may be pardoned for characterizing it thus briefly, was the necessity for separation between "live" and "dead" books, and of providing a place of sepulture or storage for the so-called "dead." If this paper did no more, and it did more, it placed definitely before librarians the ultimate necessity, which has not since been questioned, of storage repositories.

Long before President Eliot's paper was written there had been repeated suggestions as to a clearing-house for exchange of duplicates. But these two problems have usually been kept distinct, and treated as though no connection existed between them. In the meantime, while, for various reasons, the popular demand for books has greatly increased, libraries have been steadily swelling in bulk, and the questions connected with overcrowding and congestion have become more acute than ever.

Yet, I must confess it, the idea of a tomb for useless books is repugnant to me. Apart from considerations of economy, which would seem to demand that its functions be combined with at least those of a clearing-house, its very suggestions are unpleasant if not unsavory. No one, of course, calls such a thing a library. I would name it rather the Dead Sea; for it would be ever receiving, never giving. Even if what was consigned to it were not already dead (and, I am afraid, cases of premature burial would be rather frequent) the final result would be the same. Nothing could long survive amid such surroundings. But vary the figure. Call the tomb a reservoir, and instantly all the conditions change. The reservoir receives only in order that it may give forth. It is the antithesis of the Dead Sea. The one is a receptacle, the other a dispensary. In the latter there is current. Granted that here and there the motion be sluggish, possibly imperceptible, still the contents, as a whole, remain sound and useful.

Now, we can all think of more than one approximation to such a reservoir among the libraries of this country. We think of them with admiration and gratitude for their enlightened and liberal work. But the field is vast; the libraries we have just referred to are few, and have responsibilities, as we have already twice observed, over and above any they may have assumed in behalf of other libraries; whereas it is precisely with the needs of libraries that we are now concerned.

Might it not then be feasible to provide a certain number of book reservoirs to which all the libraries of a particular dis-

trict or locality could turn in time of need? These reservoirs, existing for the express purpose of serving other libraries, might have great latitude in the matter of lending, while at the same time they might combine the function of a storage warehouse and clearing-house with other services as yet hardly spoken of.

Let us proceed on the hypothesis that it is feasible, and suppose that the entire continent has been laid off into a few such districts or regions, and that in each region there has been established a great reservoir—let us call it a regional library—placed at a central point which has been selected after a careful study of the region, its lines of communication, distribution and character of its population, the size and location of its other libraries, with the kind and number of books these already possess. The regional library may have been developed from an existing library (of course with the latter's consent and co-operation), or even from a group of libraries, or it may have been established *de novo*, examination having shown the necessity for it.

The first act of the regional libraries would naturally be to get into the closest relations with all other libraries of the region. They would acquaint these latter as fully as possible with the nature of the regional collections, invite the freest application for books or for suggestive lists, and would ask to be supplied with a description of the collections of their neighbors, including mention of any especially valuable works or unusual books, journals or periodicals each might possess, as well as of the kind of books chiefly in demand by their readers. All this information would be filed.

If these two things were done, even roughly, throughout the various regions, there would result at comparatively slight exertion a sort of inventory of the library resources and reading tastes of the country, apart from the great centers. This is something that would be very difficult to obtain by other means.

Having made the acquaintance of their more immediate neighbors, the next step would be to get into touch with the Na

tional library and other great libraries throughout the country—very particularly the other regional libraries—to learn at least the strong points of the collections of each, and arrange for reciprocal exchange. It would be neither practicable nor necessary for each of these libraries to keep the catalogs of all the others. Lists of accessions, finding lists and a quarterly bulletin issued by each library, containing its classification and the number of volumes under each heading, would exhibit individual resources with considerable accuracy, and afford a ready means of judging which of several libraries was richest in a given subject, thus indicating the one to which application should be made for particular books. Knowing each other's strong and weak points, knowing, too, their own regions, and having a general acquaintance with the collections of the other great libraries, they would practically have the literary resources of the whole country at their disposal. The librarians of a region would soon get into the way of applying to their own regional library for information or for whatever books they might want. The books would either be supplied from stock, or borrowed at the nearest point and forwarded. Affiliated libraries would insensibly be drawn together, and towards the central library, and could not fail to merge into a system, although this "merger" would be purely the result of voluntary association. The smaller libraries would know that they had behind them the entire resources of the region—and many a one which now feels itself isolated, would be not merely strengthened but inspired by this thought.

But in addition to acting as reservoir to a district, regional libraries would establish branches or stations at points unprovided with libraries—just as the great city libraries now do within a much smaller radius. To branches, stations and independent libraries in its region the central library would send not alone requested books, but, at stated intervals, assortments of books of various kinds, and would, of course, call into requisition all the most

approved means of distribution, from traveling libraries to book wagons.

I say nothing of possibilities as to co-operation with the Library of Congress in issuing cards printed in accordance with the abridged rules; nor of the advantages which might accrue from co-operation in purchase among a group of libraries of such calibre as we are considering.

Though each Reservoir library would necessarily aim at a large and comprehensive collection, each would specialize to the exclusion of all others, in certain directions—each alone would collect and preserve the literature—including newspapers, periodicals, pamphlets—native to or bearing specially on its own region, and if it did not itself collect everything in these lines, would know how and by whom the work was being done.

They would constitute the natural storage libraries of their district, receiving and making accessible the overflow, whatever its nature, of their affiliated libraries; retaining it or sorting and passing it on, as the case might be, to those particular points at which it would be most useful. Thus in addition to being storage libraries they would almost inevitably become clearing-houses. Indeed, I sometimes wonder whether, if the work of a clearing-house could be thoroughly and effectively done, it would not, to a great extent, remove the need of storage libraries. Many books, of course, come into the world destitute of the faintest spark of life. For these there is no future but storage; yet of those that have actually lived, how few die and become permanently useless! The cases of supposed death usually turn out to have been instances of suspended animation. And who shall say that a book which appears to be lifeless, or at best languishing in its present home, is not merely pining for change of air and companions, and would not respond to a change as quickly as any other invalid? It is a question merely of finding the right environment.

As a matter of course, regional libraries would also become *the* reference libraries of their district, and not alone for the benefit of persons on the spot. For they

would be equipped with correspondence research departments, and bibliographic bureaux from which would issue, at reasonable tariff rates, certified copies of articles, answers to requests for specific information, or even for more extended bits of research. Indeed, if any libraries are ever to undertake what in Belgium they call *Documentation*, regional libraries are the very ones to do it.

One sees, or thinks one can see, a long vista of growth in the directions that have been indicated. One sees, for instance, a chain of regional libraries throughout the United States and Canada, because the scope of such institutions ought to be avowedly continental if not international, and because in certain respects—in her relatively few libraries, her great distances and small population—Canada seems to be ideally placed for making an initial experiment of this nature. And, the trial once made, perhaps the customs might be persuaded to show greater leniency towards inter-library loans. Reciprocity in exchange of books and information could do no harm to the most avowed protectionist; nay, it would tend to dissipate the ignorance of each other, which when it exists between nations is one of the chief impediments to good and friendly relations.

"But," you object, "these libraries are to be very few, and each must supply a great territory. They can never do it." Remember, in the first place, that the regions, though large, are less populous than city regions. Moreover, these libraries merely supplement, they do not completely supply. Their work would be not to displace what already exists, but to correlate it and increase its effectiveness. It is not the magnitude of their operations, but the cost of their upkeep that presents real difficulty. And as to this, have you ever observed that once the necessity or utility of a certain line of action is shown, means to carry it on are generally forthcoming? In this particular case an annual contribution[†] (in proportion to its ability) by each affiliated library and by localities

served by branches and stations might be hoped for; but, apart from this, regional libraries would be obliged to rely upon endowment.

An income of not less than \$150,000 would probably be requisite to establish one library. Does this seem a hopelessly large sum? A single great gift like that which was made, two or three years since, for purposes of education in this country would suffice to put the whole system in operation. And I do not think it possible to over-estimate the power for good of such a system.

Just one word more. The very nature of the institutions we have been discussing postulates a body of trustees or commissioners for their control. The composition of such a body would naturally be affected by the character of the endowment on which the libraries depended. But, whatever its composition, we take it for granted that its formation would mark a further step in co-ordination, and that the active co-operation of the American Library Association would be sought and secured. Just how this would be brought about is not now material. A standing committee of this Association, working with the governing body of the regional libraries, would be in a position to study all phases of the "geographical distribution" of libraries on this continent, and could therefore advise library boards which intended building, whether to establish a library of their own, or to apply for a regional branch or delivery station; could aid in determining what class of library would best fit into the locality, might, indeed, even counsel against any library or station at all in that particular spot.

Ought I to apologize to you for weaving, as I have, a sort of phantasy, in lieu of attempting a direct answer to the definite queries that have arisen in the course of these remarks?

Even a dream, you will admit, need not be unpractical. You remember that what I have said is to be taken as a general introduction to papers which you will hear later. And the plan I have followed, inadequate, in some respects, as I feel it to

[†]Hence and because they merely supplement, regional libraries would not tend to pauperize affiliated libraries.

be, seemed the best I could devise for placing before you in broad outline certain aspects of the great problem which is steadily attracting more and more attention, both in Europe and on this continent—the problem of Co-ordination.

THE PRESIDENT: Will the Secretary now present his report?

REPORT OF THE SECRETARY

Officers. The officers elected at the Minnetonka conference have served through the year with two exceptions: Mr Thomas D. Jones, elected a trustee of the Endowment fund, was unable to accept, and the Executive board appointed Mr W. C. Kimball in his stead for the term of three years. Miss Mary E. Ahern, elected Recorder, resigned in September, 1908, and the Executive board chose Miss Alice B. Kroeger for the remainder of the year.

Members. There are slightly over 2,000 members in good standing at the beginning of this conference, a larger number than ever before and a net increase of about 50 during the past year.

The *library* membership is something over 200 and might well be double this number. It is reasonably permanent. Once a member, a library usually remains a member. It would be a matter for rejoicing if this were as true of individuals. While there are hundreds of our number who have been members for as many years as they have been in library work and who pay their dues much as they eat their meals, there are other hundreds who are intermittent joiners, whose membership record is punctuated with gaps which mark the years that the conference met at a distance or in which they "just forgot."

Finances. Hundreds of members pay into the Association treasury a small sum year after year, as dues. Because of frequent questions showing ignorance as to the exact use made of this money and a commendable desire to learn just what becomes of it, it seems worth while to make a plain statement of these money matters.

The source and amount of its assets and income, with the manner and matter of

its outlay, are items which every member of the Association is entitled to know. They are, of course, presented in various official reports at annual meetings and printed thereafter in the Proceedings, but with such circumstantial minuteness and in fashion so obsequious to the exigencies of debit and credit, that the bottom facts, the bare, unencumbered, essential business of the Association, are not readily apparent save to the few who are closely concerned with its budget and bills.

Three committees are charged with matters of finance: the Trustees of the endowment funds, the Publishing board and the Executive board. Each has a separate treasury and each reports to the Association at the annual conference.

The Trustees of the endowment funds hold securities to the amount of \$100,000 in the Carnegie fund and \$7,000 in the general endowment fund. The income from the Carnegie fund, something over \$4,000 per annum, is paid to the Publishing board. The income from the general Endowment fund, about \$300 per annum, is spent as the Council directs and is usually paid into the general treasury and for current expenses. The Trustees of the endowment funds are also charged with the safe investment of the two principal sums. A list of the securities in which these \$107,000 are now invested is printed in the "Bulletin" for May, 1909. The Publishing board spends annually in its various enterprises the \$4,000 income from the Carnegie fund and the receipts from sales of its publications (about \$8,000 in 1908), a total of about \$12,000. The last printed statement of the detailed income and outlay of the Publishing board is now in your hands and will be reprinted in the Proceedings of this meeting.

The Executive board through the Treasurer of the Association conducts its current financial business. The chief item of revenue is from annual membership dues, a sum now amounting to about \$4,700 per annum. From this sum are paid the running expenses connected with the annual conference, the publication of the "Bulletin" (including "Handbook" and